

DECEMBER 3, 1976

THE U.N. MIDDLE EAST DEBATE

ANNCR: AFTER NUMEROUS EARLIER DEBATES ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT, THE THIRTY-FIRST UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS BEGUN ITS FORMAL DEBATE ON THE MIDEAST. VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY SURVEYS THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE:

VOICE: THE DEBATE WHICH BEGINS THURSDAY IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPENED AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF EXTRAORDINARY ACTIVITY AMONG THE PARTIES CONCERNED IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. (OPT.) THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON SEEMS TO HAVE TRIGGERED A WHOLE SERIES OF STATEMENTS BY MIDDLE EAST LEADERS, MANY OF THEM IN THE FORM OF INTERVIEWS OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO PUT NEGOTIATING POSITIONS ON THE PUBLIC RECORD. (END OPT.)

FOR EXAMPLE, ISRAEL'S PRIME MINISTER RABIN DELIVERED A SPEECH AT THE RECENT MEETING OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL, IN WHICH HE CALLED FOR A HELSINKI-TYPE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST---BY WHICH HE SEEMS TO MEAN A MEETING WHICH WOULD STIMULATE TRADE AND CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ITS ARAB NEIGHBORS. IN ADDITION, HE HAS HAD TWO INTERVIEWS THIS WEEK---ONE IN THE FRENCH NEWSPAPER FRANCE-SOI AND ONE IN THE AMERICAN WEEKLY MAGAZINE TIME. PRESIDENT SADAT OF EGYPT ALSO HAD AN INTERVIEW IN TIME---LAST WEEK---AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME HE WAS MEETING WITH DELEGATIONS OF AMERICAN CONGRESSMEN. FOREIGN MINISTER ISMAIL FAHMI OF EGYPT OUTLINED HIS GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS IN A LONG INTERVIEW IN THE SEMI-OFFICIAL EGYPTIAN NEWSPAPER AL AHRAH. AND PRESIDENT ASSAD OF SYRIA GRANTED AN INTERVIEW TO THE AMERICAN COLUMNIST JOSEPH KRAFT ---AN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS THURSDAY MORNING.

(OPT.) IN ADDITION, THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER STATEMENTS BY LESSER-KNOWN PERSONS, PLUS NUMEROUS PRESS REPORTS ABOUT UNOFFICIAL MEETINGS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIAN ARABS AND SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE SHIFTS IN HITHERTO IMMOVABLE POSITIONS. (END OPT.)

THE GENERAL THURST OF ALL THIS ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE THAT EVERYONE EXPECTS NINETEEN SEVENTY-SEVEN TO BE THE YEAR IN WHICH DECISIVE MOVES ARE MADE TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. PRESIDENT SADAT HAS CALLED FOR REASSEMBLING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WITHIN SIX MONTHS, AND A DRAFT RESOLUTION SUBMITTED BY EGYPT ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE DEBATE ASKS THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO INVESTIGATE THE PROSPECTS AND REPORT BACK BY MARCH FIRST. PRIME MINISTER RABIN SAYS THAT HE EXPECTS A MAJOR NEW PEACE INITIATIVE DURING THE COMING YEAR---AND ISRAELI AMBASSADOR HERZOG SAID IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THURSDAY THAT HIS COUNTRY WAS READY TO GO TO GENEVA AT ANY TIME. THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION HAVE, OF COURSE, EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE IDEA OF RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. HIGH AMERICAN OFFICIALS OF THE FORD ADMINISTRATION HAVE EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT THE CHANCES FOR PRODUCTIVE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ARE BETTER NOW THAN THEY HAVE BEEN FOR YEARS. AND PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER INDICATED, IN HIS DISCUSSIONS LAST WEEK WITH THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, THAT THE MIDDLE EAST IS ONE OF HIS FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES.

AGAINST THIS TUMULTUOUS BUT POTENTIALLY PROMISING BACKGROUND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS BEGUN ITS MIDDLE EAST DEBATE. SIMILAR DEBATES IN THE PAST HAVE BEEN MARKED BY BITTERNESS AND STERILE ACRIMONY, AND HAVE ACTUALLY WORSENERED THE NEGOTIATING ATMOSPHERE. THIS YEAR, IT IS BELIEVED THAT A SPIRIT

OF GREATER MODERATION WILL PREVAIL. GRANTED, THERE IS PLENTY OF GROUND FOR DISAGREEMENT---FOR EXAMPLE, IT WAS OBVIOUS THURSDAY THAT EGYPT AND ISRAEL HAVE DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF WHAT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE SHOULD BE. THE ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN ARAB REPRESENTATION ALONE IS A POTENTIALLY INFLAMMATORY ONE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE SEEMS TO BE A WIDESPREAD REALIZATION THAT IT IS NOW POSSIBLE TO REGAIN NEGOTIATING MOMENTUM---AND THAT THIS MIGHT BE A GOOD TIME FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO AVOID ANY WORDS OR ACTIONS WHICH COULD LESSEN THE CHANCES FOR SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY IN THE YEAR AHEAD.

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